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SUBJECT: UNSC: MAY MIDDLE EAST BRIEFING

¶1. Summary: In the monthly briefing to the Security Council held May 24, U/SYG Ibrahim Gambari addressed the following subjects: developments on the Quartet's support for an EU funding mechanism for Palestinian assistance; the impact of Israeli closures, barrier construction and settlement activity; Hamas and Fatah intra-Palestinian conflict; and positive political signals about renewed negotiations between the parties. Gambari also touched on the events in Lebanon, particularly the National Dialogue. In their comments, Council members generally supported the Quartet funding mechanism, but differed on the details of its structure; stressed the need for the parties to resume direct negotiations; and expressed concern about the recent intra-Palestinian clashes. End Summary.

¶2. In a May 24 briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari focused on Quartet-led efforts to provide assistance to the Palestinian people to alleviate the deteriorating fiscal and humanitarian situation; the security situation, especially intra-Palestinian fighting and the impact of Israeli closures, barrier construction and settlement activity. He cited the Quartet's May endorsement of a temporary international mechanism, limited in scope and duration and operating with full transparency and accountability, be developed by the EU, that would ensure direct delivery of assistance to the Palestinian people. He also reminded the PA government that such international assistance did not relieve the PA government of its responsibilities, and recalled that the PA government had already received the important message from donor members of the Quartet that its commitment to the principles outlined by the Quartet would pave the way for the restoration of direct assistance.

¶3. On security developments, Gambari noted that intra-Palestinian fighting, especially in Gaza, had reached "worrying proportions" and highlighted the clashes between Palestinian Authority police and the new Hamas-led security force, which President Abbas has declared illegal. On movement and access, barrier and settlement issues, Gambari noted an increase in physical obstacles to movement in the West Bank, the April 26 Israeli announcement of its intention to complete the barrier around Jerusalem by the end of the year, and the Israeli Defense Ministry's recent authorization of expanded settlement construction.

¶4. On positive political signals, Gambari recalled:

-- the prospect of a Palestinian national dialogue, scheduled to begin May 25. Gambari expressed hope that the dialogue would lead to a positive political consensus between Palestinian political actors on the road ahead;

-- the May 4 presentation by Israeli Prime Minister Olmert of

governing coalition guidelines that stated that the GOI would seek to shape its permanent borders" through negotiations and agreements with the Palestinians...."; and

-- the recent meeting of President Abbas and Israeli Foreign Minister Livni at Sharm el Sheikh and the agreement for an Abbas-Olmert meeting.

15. Gambari also noted Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's May 23 meeting with President Bush, where the Prime Minister stated he intended to "exhaust every possibility to promote peace with the Palestinians." Gambari also cited President Bush's remarks that the best servant of peace was "a negotiated final status agreement" and that any such agreement could only be achieved on the basis of "mutually agreed changes." On Lebanon, Gambari reported that the sixth and seventh rounds of the National Dialogue had taken place with no agreement on the question of the Presidency, and the start of discussions of Hizballah's weapons and the development of a national defense strategy.

#### SECURITY COUNCIL VIEWS

16. For the most part, Council members focused their comments on efforts to provide humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people, the need for direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and the recent clashes between Fatah and Hamas.

17. Council members called on Hamas to accept the January 30 Quartet principles as a basis for resolving the conflict. They also expressed concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation. Many supported the May 9 Quartet

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Statement endorsing the creation of a temporary international mechanism that would ensure direct delivery of assistance to the Palestinian people, and the EU's efforts in developing that mechanism. Council members differed on the proposed mechanism's structure. France said that the payment of salaries is necessary to maintain socio-economic balance. The UK argued that the mechanism should initially focus on health services; all agree the needs are pressing and this sector deserves support. Ambassador Sanders stated that the U.S. looks forward to working closely with our Quartet partners in developing the mechanism; underscored our May 9 announcement of \$10 million in humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people; and emphasized that the U.S. is looking for additional ways to assist the Palestinian people. Russia warned that a process of financially strangling Hamas could lead to the Palestinian government's collapse.

18. Another common theme expressed by delegations was their desire for the parties to restart direct negotiations. Several delegations expressed concern over Israeli unilateral acts, such as barrier construction and settlement activities. Russia criticized Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's convergence plan, asserting that the unilateral consolidation plan was "outside the peace process," arguing that the Israeli separation policy would not give Israel peace and security, and further predicting that any unilateral establishment of borders by Israel would not be given international recognition. Ambassador Sanders stressed that a Palestinian Authority unable to prevent and punish terrorism cannot be considered a peace partner. However, other countries (Russia, France and Argentina) said that Israel has a credible Palestinian partner to negotiate with in PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Many members welcomed the May 21 Abbas meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres on the margins of the World Economic Forum conference at Sharm El Sheikh, and said that they were encouraged by Prime Minister Olmert's statement in Washington expressing willingness to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority. France stated that it

believed the political process must be launched by bringing the Quartet back to the region, so that Olmert and Abbas could meet.

19. Finally, many Council members expressed concern about the recent clashes between Fatah and Hamas. France stated peaceful resolution of the clashes must be resolved by the Palestinians and that the international community must support the National Dialogue under the aegis of President Abbas to marginalize extremists. The UK said that it would welcome one security force, but that actions on the matter "rest with the Palestinians." Tanzania urged a more active response from the international community, stating that the Quartet needed to address the issue.  
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